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Racial and social problems of the big Northern cities will increasingly spread to the suburbs. Educators must be prepared to deal effectively with them. The writer's experiences with the Englewood Board of Education in New Jersey are presented. The school district was reorganized (a 98% Negro grammar school was closed and its pupils reassigned to other schools). School organization was changed from a 6-3-3 to a 5-3-4 plan. Pre-kindergarten, reading, special counseling and guidance, curriculum reconstruction and expanded adult education programs and projects have been introduced and initiated. Future plans and sources of aid and ideas were discussed.

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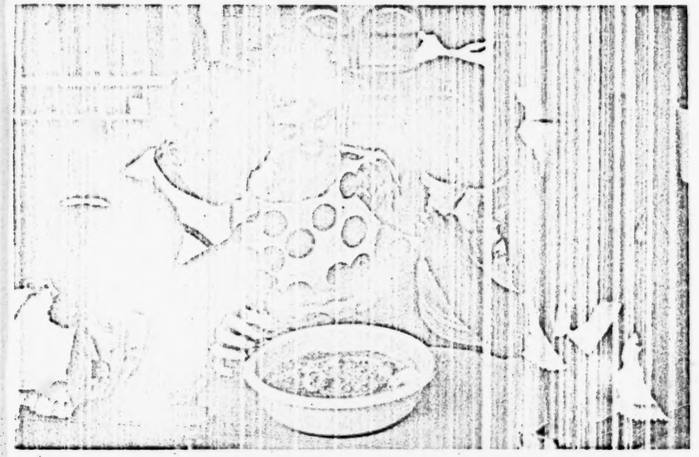
Problems in Northern Suburbs

Mark R. Shedd

The American people are becoming increasingly aware of the staggering problems in the urban centers of the North. The most dramatic and explosive are those found in areas inhabited by people who have been subject to centuries of social, economic, cultural, and intellectual containment—the American Negroes. Rent strikes, school boycotts, sit-ins, and other nonviolent demonstrations are all evidences of the reaction by Negroes to one hundred years of post-Emancipation denial of basic individual human rights.

We are now witnessing the beginning of a new phase of the revolution which is best charaterized by the spontaneous outbreaks of hoodlumism during the past summer. Events of Summer 1964 may prove to be even more symptomatic of the real condition in the inner city than prior events. Despite the heroic efforts of those directing crash assaults upon delinquency, crime, school dropouts, and unemployment, there is ample evidence to show that the cancerous conditions of which last summer's riots are only nagging symptoms will inevitably spread. The numbers of adolescent youth and young adults, as segments of the total population, are increasing and will continue to increase sharply. The greatest increases in numbers of adolescent youth may be expected in low socio-economic residential areas—those areas where crime and delinquency rates are highest. Even if the efforts of public and private social, governmental, and educational institutions should be successful in reducing the rates of crime, delinquency, and unemployment, the over-all condition will continue to worsen. The sheer magnitude of the problem, coupled with the paralytic bureaucracy which is the common political and administrative response to the conduct of public affairs in mammoth urban complexes, presents almost insurmountable obstacles to dealing effectively with these great problems.

Having stated some views regarding the problems of the inner city as seen from the periphery, let me proceed to a discussion of their implications for suburban communities. A major interest of this observer, whose direct concern and experience is as a school administrator in a small residential community (population 27,000) on the inner ring of the country's greatest metropolitan complex, is rooted in the belief that the spasmodic, explosive, and malignant conditions of the urban core will spread eventually to other parts of the region. A number of suburban communities now show evidence that they recognize some of the imminent dangers. In the New York area, communities like Englewood, White Plains, New Rochelle, Mount Vernon, Garden City, Malverne, Teaneck, and Hackensack are becoming aware of local school problems growing out of *de facto* segregation, and are making efforts to deal constructively with these problems, at least within the school systems. Since the crime, delinquency, unemployment, school dropouts, and other conditions prevailing in the black ghettoes of the North stem largely from racial discrimination of one form or another, let us examine this aspect of the total problem first.



Although the general condition of the Negro in the North is an improvement over his condition in the South, he is still generally cast in the role of second-class citizen. The forms of discrimination are more subtle but nonetheless real. Despite recent steps to open many areas of employment to Negroes, many jobs are still closed. Furthermore, limited cultural background and poor education prevent many otherwise able Negroes from competing successfully for jobs which are open. In housing, too, efforts are being made to eliminate ghettoes and overcome both the barriers to free choice and the tendency on the part of Negroes to settle together. The higher costs of better homes in middle-class communities and the generally lower income of Negroes operate against these efforts, however.

The limited opportunities for positive constructive contacts between Negroes and whites tend to limit the mobility of Negroes in American society. It is a natural human tendency to fear or mistrust the unknown. Whites who have scant personal acquaintance with non-whites are prone to suspect the habits, the motivations, and the characteristics of the people with black skins. Likewise, Negroes tend to generalize about their white fellow human beings, as evidenced by the mistrust, resentment, and antagonisms so often expressed.

In education, too, we have discriminated in many subtle ways. Whether by design, by chance, or by default, we have often allowed schools attended largely or completely by Negroes to become second-rate

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in facilities, faculties, instructional materials, and reputation. Is it any wonder that all-Negro schools have been the focus of the expressions of discontent, especially when education is seen more and more as the key to a better job, a better home, a better way of life?

Among whites who have opposed the alleviation of the high concentration of Negro children in school are many intelligent, well-intentioned, and professedly unbiased people. They offer convincing arguments for not making changes in either the form of school organization or the method of assigning children to schools. They are concerned that the costs of busing will deplete funds now going directly to the education of children; that educational standards will suffer when presumably lower-achieving children are mixed with presumably more able children; that the safety of children having to travel longer distances to school is being sacrificed; that the school "nearest home" gives the child a greater sense of security and familiarity with his surroundings.

Unfortunately, there are also among the opponents of desegregation a number of people whose motives are less worthy. While presenting a veneer of nondiscrimination, they preach fear of the flight of middle-class whites from the community; they spread reports about the misconduct, the smutty language, the incidence of crime and delinquency, and the uncouth personal habits of Negroes; they allude obliquely to the inevitability of miscegenation when Negroes and whites associate freely.

While most of the feared results are not inevitable, some of the concerns and fears voiced by the rabid proponents of neighborhood schools are not without substance. In the urban center, as in the suburbs, there are facts to show that as Negro enrollments increase there tends to be an exodus of middle-class white children to private schools and to "more protected" outlying communities. For this reason it is imperative that moves to eliminate *de facto* segregation be accompanied not only by special programs to upgrade the achievement and aspirations of the disadvantaged members of the Negro minority *but also* to improve the over-all quality of the educational offerings to all children. If public schools can create an educational program of sufficiently high quality that any parent with a choice of school or living place will think twice before withdrawing from the integrated public school, then the schools and the community may be saved from becoming re-segregated.

In July of 1963, the Englewood Board of Education received a directive from the State Education Commissioner that it must alleviate a condition of extreme (98%) concentration of Negro children at the Lincoln Elementary School. In considering alternative methods of dealing with the problem, the Board applied three basic criteria. Any plan to comply with the directive must be 1) educationally sound, 2) administratively practicable, and 3) economically prudent. Such a plan was devised, approved, and implemented in October 1963.

By this plan Lincoln Elementary School was closed for regular classroom instructional purposes. A city wide sixth grade school was established on an interim basis at the former junior high school (then vacant except for Board offices), simultaneously taking in the Lincoln sixth graders and freeing space in the schools from which the others came. The children of the earlier grades at Lincoln were assigned to the other elementary schools of the community—assignments being made on the basis of geographical proximity and equalization of class loads. Due to the small geographical size of Englewood, no busing is required.

The long-range plan of the Board is to alter the school organization so that grade groupings in the elementary, junior high, and high schools change from 6-3-3 to 5-3-4, and to consolidate elementary school facilities at three locations. The first step will be to enlarge and remodel the present high school to accommodate the addition of the ninth grades, while updating many of the facilities which have become obsolete during the thirty years since the high school was built. The sixth grades (now housed separately) will then be assigned to the present junior high, thus creating a middle school comprising grades six, seven, and eight.

Subsequent stages of the long-range plan call for the enlargement of three elementary schools to accommodate children of the system enrolled in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and grades one through five. Two buildings, the Lincoln and Liberty Schools, will no longer be used for regular instructional purposes. (Lincoln School, as at present, will be used for central administrative offices and special education;

the Liberty School presumably will be disposed of. Both buildings are judged to be too obsolete to be considered in any long-range building utilization program.)

Accompanying these changes in school organization and pupil assignment have been a number of educational innovations designed to improve and upgrade the total program for all children. A frontal attack was made on the problem of reading instruction. A nongraded levels program in reading is now in its second year throughout the elementary schools, and is being installed at the junior high school. A teaching teams program has been instituted at the Engle (6th grade) School in order to utilize more effectively the teaching talents of the faculty and to deploy the pupils in ways better suited to their diverse needs and abilities.

Other programs already in effect or in advanced stages of planning include the following:

- a pre-kindergarten program open to all four-year-old children of the community, with a related program of parent education and counseling on the development and needs of young children;
- a *One-for-One* program designed to provide both enrichment and tutorial services by volunteer adults to underachieving children on a one-to-one basis;
- curriculum reconstruction projects in the several academic areas;
- staffing of the Engle School by full-time specialists in reading, library, visual aids, and guidance, in addition to classroom teachers, with maximum pupil-teacher ratio of 25:1;
- an expanded program of adult education with offerings in high school equivalency, basic 3R's, citizenship education, and home management.

At present, the program of adult basic education represents the school system's principal tie with the community's housing and employment programs addressed to the same problems. It has met with a surprisingly good response, largely by persons interested in improving themselves in order to secure jobs or improve upon present jobs, and will be expanded under the provisions of the Anti-Poverty Bill. Also in response to the anti-poverty program the school system intends to press for provisions for day-care programs in low-cost housing centers, and to pursue the possibility of establishing a neighborhood youth corps that would work closely with local welfare and employment services to find employment for disadvantaged young people.

The added costs connected with the research, development, and evaluation of these new programs are supported in part by a $250,000 grant from the Ford Foundation, awarded to the Board last spring, and covering a three-year period. The comprehensive nature of the effort thus supported may be seen through the eight major task areas to which the Englewood School Development Program addresses itself:

1. To develop a pattern of *school organization* with flexibility to accommodate the differences in learning rates among individual children and youths.
2. To design and construct a *curriculum* for the schools that is spiral in nature, returning each year from kindergarten through twelfth grade to reconsider and further develop basic course concepts.
3. To induce flexibility in the assignment of *staff* so as to use their time, talents, training, interests, and experiences effectively and efficiently.
4. To arrange *pupils* for instruction in flexible groupings that vary in size and procedure, depending on both the materials to be presented and the capacities of the individual pupils involved.
5. To expand greatly the material *resources* for learning.
6. To increase the amount of *time* when children may use the facilities of the school for learning.
7. To enlarge the cooperative efforts of *school and university* to strengthen the program of the schools and improve the education of teachers.
8. To develop educational specifications for new *facilities* which are consistent with the requirements of a forward-looking instructional program.

The Englewood Board has also engaged the Center for Field Studies of the Harvard Graduate School of Education to undertake "both a long-range prediction of population and school enrollments, and an analysis of the composition of that change." Primarily, the purpose of the Center's work will be to estimate the possibilities of organizing and maintaining integrated public school facilities for the foreseeable future. Secondarily, the purpose will be to test the school system's plans for curriculum, personnel, facilities, and finance, and to suggest modifications of such plans where population studies indicate that new or different directions are called for.

Mark R. Shedd, Ed.D. '60, a speaker at the New York regional meeting of HGSEA last May, is superintendent of schools in Englewood, New Jersey.

While school desegregation does not in and of itself bring about better education, as by some mysterious osmotic process, it does establish the following *conditions* for better-quality education:

1. It breaks the impasse of white intransigence which stands in the way of accepting Negroes as persons of equal intrinsic worth.
2. It offers convincing proof to Negroes of the sincerity of our efforts to provide equal educational opportunity for all.
3. It affords the opportunity for constructive contacts between Negro and white children and adults by which doubts and suspicions, ignorance and misunderstanding may be overcome.

It is the writer's firm belief that racial integration of the schools in a northern suburban community, accompanied by imaginative school improvement, can lead to better education and a stronger community, and thereby prevent the spiral of cancerous conditions that prevail in the urban core. What is required is a dedicated board of education, a faculty committed to good education for all children and youth, a willingness on the part of parents and other citizens to seek rational solutions to emotionally-charged problems, and leaders with imagination and courage to assume the role of community catalyst in reaching for solutions.